1: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

631 life and each could be taken as a unit complete in itself. Individual studies and comparisons of one with another would provide much valuable material. Familiarity with individuals and groups belong-
184] ing to all the major tribal groups, and study of their folk-lore and customs has led me to conclude that as in language, so in social structure and in culture, the differences are of small account. In offering illustrative material, I shall give its tribal source.

The King

643 To describe the royal office and functions it would be necessary
177 to use the past tense. That reason, along with others, leads me to exclude this subject from the present study. Effective European occupation of the country and government by direct rule[1] have atrophied the royal office among the Ovimbundu until to-day kings survive as hardly more than living museum pieces. This being the case, I shall only enumerate the royal functions, very briefly characterize them, and pass on to describe other and living parts of the Umbundu social organism.

643 The principal functions of the royal office were:

776 1. *Religious.* The spirits of the king's ancestors were the principal national deities. The king was not only high priest but
778] also the visible vice-regent and incarnation of the spirits. The sacrifices at the royal shrine, *kakokoto* (literally, at the skulls), the place of the royal skulls, were for the nation in order:

643 (*a*) *To control the elements*, i.e. to ensure a sufficient supply of
372 rain and avoid the dangers caused by hail, by lightning, &c. Also
789 to control fire by providing a new fire properly (ceremonially) kindled from which everyone took his fire. A king's reign was spoken of as 'during the Water of Lord So-and-so' (*Kovova a Ñalã Ngandi*), or 'during the Fire of Lord So-and-so' (*Kondalu ya Ñalã Ngandi*).

241 (*b*) *To ensure fertility*, toward which desideratum the royal
644 marriage had great influence. The queen's special province was
782] agriculture and her kitchen was sanctified by human sacrifice to guarantee the national food supply. Ceremonially treated seed was distributed to be mixed with the seed of each granary.

[1] 'Direct rule' is applied in most parts of Africa where European settlement is the predominant consideration and also where centralized government is the ideal. 'Indirect rule' is best illustrated in the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Uganda, and Tanganyika Territory.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

(*c*) *In hunting*, deities other than the king's ancestors were invoked, especially *Hôvi*, the hunters' god, and *Kaunja*, a goddess, both of which had their own shrines and priests. These may have been connected with the country or with its earlier inhabitants (the kings being recognized as late comers). At the inaugural hunt the offices were assigned. The king's character was supposedly revealed by the sex of the animal killed at this hunt: 'If the duiker[1] is a female, then it is good indeed, but if a male, then the king is a real person but he habitually will become angry to excess' (*Nda ombambi yaco omange civua mutîl, puai nda ukuma, Soma omuna puai o tema tema enene*).

2. *To represent the nation in its external relations*, i.e. (*a*) *To make agreements with other kings to promote trade*, and (*b*) *To make war on other peoples* in order to provide his court with tribute and his warriors with plunder. The war leader (*Kasongo*) had his own residence and establishment entirely separate from that of the king, whom he must not meet face to face except on certain state occasions. In Bailundu he, with certain other officials, was of the stock of the slaves of the state (*ovinduli viosoma*) who came from Luandu in the Songo country. Each king must inaugurate his reign with a war, during or after which he must ceremonially 'eat the old one' (*oku: lia ekongo*)—a feast consisting of the flesh of a specially fattened slave cooked with the flesh of the principal animals commonly eaten.

3. *To dispense justice*. In point of time consumed, this question was very important, for it occupied much of the time of both rulers and ruled. Good evidence of this is in the number of proverbs used at court, second only in number to those used for the education of the young. The king's court (*olusenje*) was the supreme court of the nation where cases were continually heard and 'fines eaten' (*oku lia ocimbu*). Cases might be settled either by ordeal or by decision of the king, and there was therefore room for appeal and re-trial. The king's word, however, was final, as the proverb has it: *O popia ongenji, o mãlipo ocoma.* (The advocate speaks, the king finishes [decides].) The king was not generally arbitrary in his decisions but was bound not only by the customs of his people, but also by the desires of his councillors. Among the legitimate kings of the Ovimbundu there were comparatively few of the revolting and wholesale punishments which were so

[1] The duiker, *ombombi* (*Sibiotragus grimmi leucogenys*).

A few words from the childhood recollections of Paulino Ngonga Liahuka[1] bring out the facts.

One day we noticed that Sekulu Upalandanda[2] and my father went to the mountain of Kalilonge saying, 'We go to look around (and find out) whether the spirits (*olosonde*) have agreed to our moving there.' Then another day we saw that the fathers were coming out of the spirit huts (*etambo*, plural), with the sacred chests (*ocimbangu*, plural), saying, 'We go to start a new village.' When they had arrived under the mountain of Kalilonge, they said, 'The spirits have agreed.' Then when everyone had moved, the elder, whose name had been Upalandanda at Muenesi, now changed his name, declaring, 'I am *Cilembo-camunda* (Shadow of Mountain). From that time the place was called Cilembo.

On seeking a new site the headman's fire in the old village is put out and the procession starts: a girl carries the sacred chest (*ocimbangu*) containing the relics (*ociye*) and the balls of iguana skin, and a boy the sacred bows.[3] They lead the way to the site selected where they cut a pole[4] suitable for a house-wall (*ekoso*), and tie a leaf of the *upu*[5] tree to it, dig a hole into which they put mud made by rain-water (*onata yondombo*),[6] and then together they lift the stick and let it fall into the hole. This is the beginning of the spirit hut (*etambo*), the first house to be built on the new site. The boy and the girl must take part ceremonially in each operation of building the hut. After that they together ignite (*oku tiafula*)[7] the new fire. A hen and a cock are killed, cooked on the new fire, and eaten inside the *etambo* by all who have taken part in the building. The headman and his wife cannot return to the old village but must camp at the new site (*situla*) and keep the new fire alight.

In building their houses, the villagers may commute (*oku unula*) from the old site, but often the distance is too great to do this, and

[1] Of Ciyuka, ordained pastor of Elende Church in 1930. He was Hambly's chief informant.

[2] Sekulu Upalandanda was the younger brother of Ngonga's father's father, and therefore grandfather to Ngonga.

[3] The bow (*ekupi*) of each ascendant who is now a guardian spirit (*osonde*) of the family.

[4] When this first pole is cut, the axe should first be pointed toward the cardinal directions.

[5] A leaf of the *upu* tree is used in the divorce ceremony. Its use here is a sign of divorce from the old site.

[6] Literally, 'mud of the rainy season'.

[7] This was formerly done with a fire drill (*vide* Hambly, op. cit., Plate XXXIV), but not for a number of years now. When I showed the above picture to a group of 150 young men of 17 to 25 years of age, not one of them even knew what it was.

1: Childs M-S (1924-1960) 1940 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

therefore the usual procedure is to erect temporary grass-covered huts (*olosingi*, plural) on the new site, in which they will live while building their houses. Each hearth-fire must be ignited from the headman's fire.

The houses are built by the occupants themselves. The men's club house is built by the communal labour of all men and boys with a simple ritual designed to promote concord within, and to ensure that the spirits (*olosonde*) may find it a congenial abode. The spirits regularly attend the discussions in the *onjango*, and there receive their daily portions. There also they are believed to sleep.

At the first opportunity a hunt will be held and the meat brought to the spirit-hut. The girl who carried the sacred chest receives the heart and the boy the head. At this time, while a pot of sour beer (non-alcoholic) (*ocisangua*) is being brewed, the girl sits quietly in communion (*oku felevela*) with the spirits. With these physical and spiritual preparations the village community makes ready its home, a home which may seem poor and meagre to the eyes of outsiders, but to a member of the community it is home indeed and evokes in him, when absent, a feeling of great home-sickness (*ongeva*). As the Umbundu version of 'Home, Sweet Home' puts it:

Kaliwa, kaliwa, nda ku ñi ombumbi ku yota
To your own, to your own, if there is cold you can warm yourself,

nda ku ñi onjala ku panga.
if there is hunger you can arrange.

Ngendo is surrounded by a stick palisade except on that side of the headman's household which is adjacent to the rocks used as a club-house. The village itself (and each section) is divided up into compounds, each of which contains one to three houses,(1) and palisades divide one compound from the next; between are paths leading to the *ocila* and out of the village. Small gardens for tobacco, maize and beans are within the compounds, and the larger fields lie outside the village at from thirty minutes' to an hour's walk. In the headman's section of Ngendo there are 25 households containing 32 houses in all. Each house has its own granary *(ocila)* and a small chicken-coop built on stilts, and of all the houses only six have separate kitchens *(ocima)*. Most households had separate pens for pigs, goats and sheep for the night,(2) and at one side of the headman's compound there is a common corral for the nine cattle owned by the section. Only the headman had a spirit-hut *(etumbo)*, used also as a storehouse, for entertaining his guests, and for his own use should he wish to sleep apart from his wives.

Chiefs' villages or olombolo (singular *cabola*) are often surrounded by a belt of tall trees.(3) The chief's compound (the *ilombe*) is larger than those of other villagers, and, according to Hambly,(4) usually contains: the chief's house, which always has a separate sleeping-room; a house and a kitchen for each of his wives; a tomb for the burial of the chief and his wives; a house of meditation for the chief, and pens for pigs and chickens.

Umbundu houses are usually circular, but sometimes rectangular, and made of wattle and daub, with thatched roofs. Sometimes huts are divided by matting into a living-room and a sleeping-room. Cooking is often done in the house itself, but sometimes a separate hut is built as a kitchen.(5)

The *onjango* (the Men's Club House) consists of a cone-shaped roof set on stout hardwood poles instead of a wall, and left open so that those for whom there may be no place inside may still see and hear what takes place within.(6)

Villages are moved when fields are exhausted and others are not available nearby(7) or, more often, when there has been illness or death in the village, which implies that some action displeasing to the spirits has been committed. (No information is available concerning the usual length of life of a village.) When the new site is chosen, the headman's fire in the old village is extinguished, and a procession starts, led by a boy carrying the sacred bone *(ohonji)* of each ascendant who is now a guardian spirit of the family (i.e. the olusa), and a girl carrying the sacred chest *(ocisanga)* containing the relics *(ocitye)* and the hulls of iguana skin.(8) On arriving at the site the boy and girl cut and plant the

(1) In this section there were 13 goats, 20 sheep, 100 pigs and about 200 chickens. (Childs, op.cit., p.31) (2) Ibid.

(3) Hambly, (2) 1934, p.208 et.al. It was a custom of the Nyangela peoples to plant trees round the village and dedicate them to deceased chiefs. (See McCulloch 1950, p.68.) There is no evidence that the trees surrounding Umbundu villages have any ritual significance, although the custom may have been taken over from the conquered Nyangela peoples.

(4) Op.cit., p.208. (5) Ibid., p.20

(6) Childs, personal communication.

(7) See often to European settlement. (8) See below, p.47.

Observing at the site the boy and girl cut and plant the

first pole, which is to be a part of the new etambo (spirit hut). The boy and girl must take part ceremonially in each operation of building the hut, and when it is built they ignite the new fire. A hen and a cock are killed, cooked on the new fire, and eaten inside the *etambo* by all who have taken part in building it. The headman and his wife must remain on the new site to keep the fire alight; other villagers may commute from the old village or erect temporary grass shelters on the new site. Houses are built by the occupants themselves, although men may give each other mutual help, for which there is a gift of food and beer. The *onjango* is usually built by the communal labour of all boys and men, and on its completion a simple ritual is performed to promote harmony within and to welcome the spirits, who are believed to sleep in the *onjango* and to take part in all discussions within it.(1)

The village group: composition

Childs describes the relationship of the villagers of Ngendo to each other as typical of Ubundu country. Most of the heads of households are related agnatically to their respective section-heads (who are presumably also related agnatically to each other, since the village is based on the *olaso* group); Childs does not however discuss the relation of section heads to each other or to the village headman. He gives a table in which the householders are divided into six categories according to their relationship to their various section-heads:

1.	Patrynal relatives of section head:	Section A (headman's)	21
		" B	2
		" C	1
		" D	2
			26
2.	Maternal relatives of section head:	Section B	4
		" C	1
		" D	1
			6
3.	Sisters' sons (or daughters)(2)	Section B	4
		" C	1
			5
4.	Relatives by marriage	Section A	2
		" B	1
			3
5.	Relationship not definitely known	Section B	2
6.	Former slaves	Section A	1
		" B	1
			2

(1) This section is based on Childs, 1949, pp.37-9.
(2) Who could, of course, have been included as maternal relatives and paternal relatives, since they belong both to the *olaso* and to the *olaisa*.

A man slave might become a blacksmith or a hunter, although his work was always for his master. He was also required to fight for his master in case of war.(1)

RELIGION AND MAGIC

Information on Umbundu religion and magic is very slight, being practically confined to a few items collected by Hambly from his Umbundu interpreter,(2) and a more coherent article by Tucker, primarily on divination.(3)

THE SUPREME BEING

Suku, the Supreme Being, is thought of as the creator of mountains, rivers, sky and human beings.(4) His attributes have not been described.

CONCEPTS OF SPIRIT(5)

The body *(etimbo)* is thought of as having *omenyo* (breath or life), and containing the *ocililemba* (spirit or soul). The *ocililemba* is visible in a person's shadow in the daytime, and during sleep it has adventures of its own, which it reports to the sleeper through dreams *(olonjoi)*. At death it leaves the body, but lingers nearby, accompanying the body to the interment, still in the form of a shadow. It then becomes an *ocilulu* (ghost), and may wander where it pleases. Sometimes it may be seen passing with superhuman swiftness through the village, uttering weird cries or calling pigs or chickens as the person used to do while alive. It chooses one of the households as a home, and indicates its wish to stay there by causing illness among the householders. The victim when he has learned the cause of his illness from the diviner places himself in a favourable condition to receive the spirit by performing a ceremony which includes going into a trance.(6) When this ceremony has been performed the *ocilulu* (ghost) becomes an *ondele*, which appears to be a generic name for ancestral (and other?) spirits. It is not clear from Tucker's description whether the relatives of the deceased always wait for this intimation of the wish of the ocilulu for a home, or whether the ceremonies may sometimes be performed immediately after death. Nor does she give any information regarding the relatives with whom the *ocilulu* usually chooses to live. She states that spirits of paternal ancestors are less feared than those of maternal ancestors, for while the former are usually satisfied with a hunt, a beer-drinking and a feast held in their honour, the latter are malignant and may "eat" children and occasionally adults also.

The *ohamba* (sing. *ehamba*) "are the peaceful spirits of ancestors of long ago, who have already had the trance ceremony performed for them, and thus have a home and ... standing in the other world". (Tucker does not indicate how much time must pass before a spirit becomes a *ehamba*.(7))

(1) Hambly, 1934, p.206. (2) Op.cit., chap.IX.
(3) 1940. (4) Hambly, op.cit., p.262.
(5) Based on Tucker, op.cit. unless otherwise stated.
(6) Tucker does not describe this ritual.
(7) It may be noted that among the Ngangela peoples to the east, the *ohamba* are the forms taken by ancestral spirits when they wish to harass their descendants. See McCulloch 1951, p.75.

769 They intimate their wishes to their descendants only through slight illness, usually asking for honour to be paid to them by a feast, or by some descendant carrying on their profession.

Osande is the spirit of the much-honoured founder of the family,(1) and is always beneficent, bringing good fortune and warning his descendants of danger. Hambly and Tucker agree that *Ekisi* is the same kind of spirit as *Osande* (although Hambly does not give *Osande* this special meaning). Tucker writes that *Ekisi* is a benevolent spirit who calls the villagers together at night, and gives them advice through a medium (?), whom he enters without the latter's going into the usual trance. *Kandundu* according to Tucker is an *ekisi* who holds the leading position among the ancestral spirits owing to his seniority. Hambly describes a shrine to *Kandundu* at Bailundu; anyone who sees the contents of the shrine is supposed to become blind. He writes that *Kandundu* is thought of as "the spirit of dreaming who makes swellings on the body", but gives no further explanation. According to Tucker *Kandundu* is an especially powerful *ondele*, and ceremonies performed for him have many distinctive features.

776 769 [778]

224 776 778 *Huvi*, the spirit of the hunt, has his own shrine and priest in the village of the (paramount?) chief. His hut is very large, since all the meat of the hunts is placed in it. In front of it dances are held, and poles are decorated with skulls and other trophies of hunting. Before the door there is a carved figure of *Samamba*, the spirit who chases the game towards the hunter. A man whose ritual name is *Kapila*, and a woman called *Kuanja*(2) are in charge of the spirit-hut of *Huvi*, and make supplication to him for success in hunting. Hunters living elsewhere but in an *onbala* or head village do not have persons bearing these ritual names, but their dogs are often called *Huvi*, *Samamba*, *Kapila* or *Kuanja*.

[553]

775 754 The most dreaded spirits are the *otulopokopoko*, who may be spirits of still-born babies or foetuses, mental defectives, maltreated slaves, or persons, especially children, killed by sorcery. When a person has been found guilty of killing a child by sorcery or witchcraft, he is sentenced to "restore life" to it, which he does by substituting for it a child from his own family: if the deceased child is a girl, he must give an ox as well. The child is treated with great respect by his new family. If however the parents do not ask the sorcerer or witch for restitution, the child becomes an *okalupokopoko*, and may return to "eat" other children, at the command of the sorcerer who has killed it.

RITUAL

793 613 It has been noted that the village headman acts as priest for the *olusa*, the group of paternally-related persons who form the basis of the village group, while the head of the *oluina* acts as priest for his dispersed, maternally-related group.(3) There is little detailed information on the religious duties of these priests. Cushman(4) describes the village headman as making public prayers each morning to Suku. Childs however points out(5) that it is more usual for the headman to spend a

(1) i.e. of either the *olusa* or the *oluina*. (Childs, personal communication)
(2) According to Childs; (1949, p.21) *Kuanja* is a hunting goddess.
(3) See above, p.28.
(4) 1944, p.51. (5) Personal communication.

787

whole supernatural world... The divining basket is the concrete medium through which the spirits reveal their will to their descendants on earth, and warn them of dangers, human or supernatural".(1)

SORCERERS AND WITCHES

754 776

Sorcerers and witches are not clearly distinguished. Both are called *olonganga*, and have powers over one or more malignant spirits whom they can send anywhere to kill, steal, or torment. These "familiar spirits" are sometimes called *otulo ndumba*, and are held responsible for all mysterious disappearances of maize, beans and other possessions, as well as for many illnesses and deaths. Some sorcerers are said to own small images which they send out at night. Others are said to dance naked at night at the door of the intended victim's house. When sorcery involves killing by physical means, portions of the victim's body may be used to make "medicine" or charms.(2)

754 683

A person may be a sorcerer without knowing it, and may deny it when accused by the diviner. If he does so, he and his accuser undergo the *osbulungu* (poison test),(3) to discover who is in the right.(4) Concerning accusation of sorcery, Childs writes "Any marked success ... by an individual, especially when such success has been achieved by an individual alone or in partnership, but not in co-operation with a number of persons, often brings on suspicion of sorcery. Should the results of such success be distributed widely....suspicion is less likely to arise....An open accusation of sorcery *(oku sunga owanga)* is a very serious matter and will not often be made lightly. Such accusations are made both within and across kinship lines. Affinal relatives are quite often accused of sorcery, and suspicion frequently rests upon wives whose kinship connexions are in distant regions..." .(5)

[578]

754 [827]

The tendency or aptitude for sorcery is supposed to be inherited by a daughter, or a son, or a nephew from the mother, uterine or classificatory, from the mother's brother etc. It is said that older relatives take younger ones as apprentices and partners.(6) The aim of a person who consciously takes up sorcery is said usually to be economic advancement. A very common form involves the enslavement of the spirit of another person, often a child of one's own family or kin group; the victim may be killed by either physical or magical means. Childs points out that sorcery is one of the greatest internally disruptive forces within the kin group and social system of the Ovimbundu. He notes that jealousy and grudges often bring accusations from within the circle of kin, but does not describe what happens when the charges have been made and verified. Especially in view of his statement that economic, political and other forces now seem to be acting to increase the incidence of sorcery,(7) it would be interesting to have information concerning its possible connection with segmentation of lineages or village groups, or its relation to tensions between the paternal and maternal groups of relatives.

754 578

(1) Tucker, op.cit., p.201.
(2) Childs, personal communication.
(3) The *osbulungu* is administered by the medicine-man, and causes sickness but not death. See Tucker, op.cit., and Hambly, (2) 1934, p.203.
(4) Tucker, op.cit.
(5) Childs, 1949, p.57.
(6) Childs, personal communication.
(7) Childs, 1949, p.58.

683 One of the commonest forms of punishment for sorcery was, and still is, banishment. Only the chief could pronounce the death penalty. Charges of sorcery are sometimes brought today to civil courts and to church courts under the guise of "poisoning".(1)

781 There are obvious gaps in the information on Umbundu religion and magic e.g. on spirits other than those of ancestors; on ritual connected with the ancestors; on productive and protective magic; on the work of the medicine-man as distinct from the diviner, and on the functions of the two separate offices of family priest. From existing accounts, however, Umbundu magico-religious concepts would appear to have much in common with those of the peoples to the east of the Plateau, and many of the words used for these concepts *(ngombo, ahamba, wanga, nganga* e.g.) are in fact the same. These peoples have been described in another section of the Survey.(2)

THE LIFE CYCLE

852 Childs' chapters on infancy, childhood, and adolescence form the main part of his book, and his treatment of the subject is much more detailed and on a deeper level than information offered by other writers,(3) and should be consulted.

BIRTH

844 A woman remains in her husband's village for the birth of her children. During the first birth, she is generally assisted by older women of the village, usually relatives of the husband. No man is present unless delayed labour entails the presence of a medical practitioner, or a diviner. Difficult delivery is said to be caused by broken taboo, adultery on the part of the mother, sorcery, or the woman's own refusal to give birth. There is little ceremony connected with childbirth, and a woman may give birth to her second and later children alone when she is in the fields. There is a customary lying-in period until the cord falls from the navel, but this is frequently ignored today.

845 *Twins* are welcomed but are considered prodigies whose birth requires the administrations of an *ocimbanda*.(4) Soon after the birth, and every month while the children are growing, the whole village takes part in a ceremony to preserve their lives. In the case of triplets, one is given to the paramount chief.(5)

553 *Naming* usually takes place, in the case of a first-born, on the day of its birth. Childs notes several factors:

(a) The name *(onduko)* should have been borne by a relative, whether living or dead, whose character and state of well-being are satisfactory; sometimes the child may be considered the re-incarnation of the deceased relative after whom he is named.†

(1) Childs, personal communication. (2) McCulloch, 1951, pp.72-83.
(3) Hambly, (2) 1934, pp.212-33, and Cushman, 1944.
(4) Ennis, 1945. (5) Childs, 1949, p.83.

† [Childs, op. cit., p. 87-]

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

Among direct educational forces are the home training given by parents and the mutual responsibility of children and their mother's brother, whose reciprocal obligations have been explained. Family life is undeniably an important institution whose power is by no means suppressed by the strength of the village community and tribal organization. 867

Initiation, which may or may not coincide with puberty, is perhaps the most potent direct influence in formation of character and the inculcation of principles tending to tribal solidarity. Formerly warfare and hunting were more important than they are today, consequently initiation rites imposing hardship and emphasizing the importance of concerted action, had a greater social value than they have at present. 867 881

Formal instruction in industries such as iron-working, or professional hunting, indicates one aspect of occupational training. In these instances there are apprenticeship and an initiatory rite. All children are, however, subject to an indirect industrial education through the agency of play, while a few, according to desire and aptitude, become experts in some particular occupation. 874 [868]

At all times the force of suggestion is at work in the home, in the men's council house, and through everyday observation of the conduct of elders. Probably folklore stories also have an indirect educational value, because some of the fables show the desirability of courage, honesty, and foresight, at the same time deprecating cowardice, stupidity, and low cunning. 869

In chapter IX religious beliefs are discussed, and, in connection with these, standards of conduct are outlined. Although the Ovimbundu have a belief in a supreme being and creator (Suku), and although they believe in survival after death, there is no evidence to show that conduct and education are influenced by theological beliefs. Suku, who is vaguely conceived, is far away and uninterested. He issues no commands. Neither is there a belief in punishments and rewards after death. The standards of conduct are based on utilitarian principles which secure harmony and unity. 771 869 [776]

The efficiency of the direct and indirect educational forces of the Ovimbundu is attested by the history of the tribe. The indigenous system of education, supported by favorable environment, consolidated these people so that they became the dominating power in Angola. Moreover, their cohesion has been such that three centuries of European contacts have failed to eliminate all the basic elements of their tribal life. 177

IX. RELIGION

Supreme Being

776 Suku is the name of the most important dead person mentioned by the Ovimbundu. Ngonga says that Suku made mountains, rivers, sky, and people. The name Suku is known all over the great territory inhabited by the Ovimbundu. I have seen at the *ombala* of Ngalangi a small house of meditation where the king retires accompanied by an old woman. This retirement for communion with spirits of the dead takes place in time of drought, and a gourd filled with water is always kept in the house. In another village of the Ngalangi region I photographed a house of meditation for the king who retires for communion with spirits whenever he is troubled (Plate LXXXIX, Fig. 1). The painted marks on the door are said to be an indication to spirits that this is the king's house of meditation, but there is no reason for saying that the king communes with Suku.

The evidence regarding Suku was supplemented at Ngalangi by two Ovimbundu boys who agreed that Suku was very important. They associated Suku with rain; but the word *suku* does not mean rain, water, or food; these are expressed by *ombela*, *ovava*, and *okulia*, respectively. I know of no meaning of the word *suku* which might assist in explaining the attributes of this respected spirit. Names of medicine-men are remembered and used but they are not associated with the name Suku. My informants at Ngalangi said that names of kings are sometimes coupled with the name Suku.

773 At Ngalangi an informant stated that in the beginning everything was water. A man dropped from above, caused land to appear, and began hunting. At the side of a stream he saw an animal that disappeared beneath the water. He was about to shoot when he saw that the animal was a person something like himself, yet different. He took the animal home, mated with it, and reared a family. This story is told also at Cileso, about two hundred miles from Ngalangi. At Ngalangi I was informed that the first being was a calf with human attributes, who walked about on the rocks leaving mixed tracks of an animal and human kind, which may be seen to this day.

Survival after Death

775 787 There are ideas of reincarnation. Two Bailundu boys said that the lion was considered to be a powerful old man. If a lion is found dead divination is practised to discover the cause of death. If a

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

plate of meal and earnestly asked questions. Lukuma was the name of the father of the dead boy. The old man who addressed the corpse was the brother of Lukuma's mother. Ngonga explained that the woman addresses the corpse, "to give him sense so that he will not be ashamed to tell all about it"; that is, about the manner of his death. The old man said to the corpse, "*Etali* ["today"] *omolãngè* ["my boy"] *tu yongola* ["we want"] *oku* ["you"] *tu* ["us"] *sanjuisa* ["make glad"] *o tu* ["to us"] *sapuila* ["tell"] *muele* ["indeed"] *cosi* ["all"] *ca* ["that"] *ku upa* ["you take"] *kilu lieve* ["from earth"].

The pause which followed a question was intended to give the corpse time to reply. It is supposed that if the answer is in the negative the spirit causes the pole to swing slightly backward. An affirmative answer is given if the spirit makes the pole swing forward. The old man demanded, "Is it witchcraft that hates us and killed you? If it is witchcraft, come to the front." I could see no swing of the corpse on the pole, but Ngonga said that he could see the coffin swing backward to indicate a negative answer. I suspected that the interrogator of the corpse gave a signal to the bearers, indicating that the coffin was to be made to swing, but I could see no signal or movement of the coffin. While the corpse was interrogated, males among the spectators spoke to the old man who was asking the questions. Ngonga explained that these men were suggesting questions which might be asked respecting the cause of death. A witness in the crowd would say, "You have forgotten this," or "You have forgotten that."

The next question was one that calls for a detailed explanation. *Sambulu* is a bad spirit which is able to cause death when crying women and children offend him by their wailing. The mother of the dead boy was a slave whose husband was absent from the village for a time. During this period the master of the woman threatened to sell her; consequently she went to a Christian mission with her children, one of whom was the boy now deceased. The woman and children were crying, hence the possibility that the evil *Sambulu* had at that time entered the person of the boy whose funeral rites were now in progress. The woman had visited the mission a year ago, but this lapse of time apparently made no difference to the possibility that *Sambulu* had entered one of the children. The spirit made a negative answer to this ingenious suggestion and eventually indicated that death was due to a "bad belly." If no answer is returned affirmatively, recourse is made to the medicine-man, who carries out divination. The details of this method are described

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156 Ethnologists have often emphasized the supposed subjection of the individuals to the group. Initiation rites do tend to uniformity of conduct and group control; yet among the Ovimbundu there are renowned leaders of caravans, chiefs who are respected because of their justice and intelligence, also medicine-men, craftsmen, and musicians who display great individuality. Their self-expression in tribal life results from special aptitude and natural force of character, which qualities are made evident by daily actions, or through loquacity in the council house. In several localities live chiefs, who, by personality and tact, make possible a social adjustment between the indigenous culture and foreign intruders.

In former times kings were at the head of the legal and military systems, and in this capacity they acted when appeals were made from the jurisdiction of village chiefs. Prosperity of the country is today thought to center in kings both living and dead, and the extant ritual associated with the obsequies of a king is an illustration of this dependence. The importance of the medicine-man as a diviner, physician, and rain-maker is little diminished even at the present day.

The operation of village communism and the manner in which this centers about persons of importance is seen during the preparation of a new site for a village. A description has been given relating to the selection of the site, employment of communal labor, the creation and distribution of new fire, and the function of the medicine-man on this occasion.

•776 Direct questioning concerning spiritual beliefs and the nature of a supreme being elicits little information, and that of a contradictory kind. As usual, actions are more important than statements. At a funeral, women dance, clap hands, and sing, "God has cheated us of a life." The inference seems to be that Suku gives and determines life. Beliefs respecting the good and bad spirits (*Olosande* and *Olondele*) are deeply ingrained in the lives of the Ovimbundu, who are confident of the need for placation of spirits by sacrifice, the use of wooden figurines, and the aid of the medicine-man. A study of the contents of a diviner's basket gives a clear idea of the powers and the activities of spirits; and the function of a spirit, which is able to hear and answer the living, is understood after observing the questioning of the corpse at a funeral. Without doubt, a belief in spirits and a reliance on the power of medicine-men are two of the fundamental ideas which permeate every thought and activity of the Ovimbundu, for by these agencies mundane matters are raised to a spiritual level.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
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journeys diminished in distance as they increased in profitability.[53]

My informants, however, gave a somewhat different picture. Long trading journeys were still being undertaken in the last decade of the trade (1901–11). Some men whom I met had travelled to the kingdom of the Mwata Yamvo and beyond to Luba country; one man had made a journey into what is now the Congo Republic which took a year to go and a year to return; another had visited Barotseland. It should be said that these seem to have been unusually long journeys; journeys totalling six to eight months were common.[54]

The significance of the trade in social life is reflected in the mystical explanations of success in business found in Umbundu religion. Prosperity might be explained either by the favour of spirits such as Kandundu and Otjipuku, who received at their shrines libations of wine, or by malevolent sorcery involving the sacrifice of relatives in exchange for wealth.[55] The existence of these two explanations probably reflects the existence of some rich men who satisfied the expectations of their relatives and others who did not.

Apart from the rubber trade, the older slave trade continued until its vigorous suppression in the period 1910–12, and indeed seems, as regards the Ovimbundu, to have become intensified in the period after 1890. The slaves went to S. Tome and Principe, or to coastal plantations. Up to that time the Ovimbundu had sold few of their own people, with the exception of criminals or people who had become generally unpopular with their kin. The collapse of the old political system played into the hands of adventurers who unscrupulously exploited the Umbundu custom of debt slavery or conducted raids for this purpose.[56]

It was then the 'trade' which was the common factor in the life of all Ovimbundu, and which was so to speak the factor,

[53] Childs, p. 208.

[54] Informants.

[55] Although some old men still have shrines to the luck-giving spirits it is not possible to see how their cult functioned in the social structure then existing. It is, however, notable that success could be interpreted mystically in two ways by benevolent spirits or by sorcery.

[56] Childs, p. 213. I was told that Gumba had been raided from Bailundo.